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ABSTRACT

At the 1972 annual meeting of the Speech Communication Association, a group of communication students and scholars met to discuss what their departments are designed to accomplish. The purpose of this Action Caucus was to develop a model mission statement for communication departments located in urban settings. Three conclusions are warranted from observing the efforts of the Action Caucus: there is an interest among communication scholars in tailoring research, teaching, and community service activities to meet the needs of urban living; the Action Caucus is a small step toward reshaping the priorities and pursuits of urban-located departments; and the model of the caucus itself may illustrate how convention programs of the future may be conducted. The work begun by the Action Caucus promises to define new and important directions for research, teaching, and community service activities in urban-located departments, including the elimination of artificial interdepartmental barriers. (Author/RB)

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DEVELOPING MODEL MISSION STATEMENTS FOR URBAN-LOCATED DEPARTMENTS

A Report of a SCA Action Caucus

Donald MacDonald and Robert J. Doolittle

In December, 1972, a group of communication students and scholars met to discuss what their departments ought to be about. This Action Caucus, during the annual meeting of the SCA, is noteworthy for its focus and procedure as well as its product.

The specific purpose of the Action Caucus was to develop a model mission statement for communication departments located in urban settings. This purpose reflected both an awareness and a response to recent developments in urban education. Caucus sponsors and participants recognized that urban-located colleges and universities are under growing pressure to demonstrate sensitivity to the problems that confront major cities in the United States. Increasingly, these colleges and universities are being urged to respond to urban problems through adaptations in their teaching, research, and service functions designed to help man meet the realities and potentialities of urban life.[1]

Urban-located colleges and universities, especially publicly supported institutions, are being asked to develop and implement urban missions.

Given the structure of most urban universities, policy adopted at the institutional level must be developed and implemented at the departmental level. Thus, such departments are admonished by administrators

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[1] A recent and revealing example of such pressure and the concomitant opportunities is seen in the Carnegie Commission's recommendation that selected urban-located universities receive grants of $1 million for ten years to "aid the cities and revitalize higher education."

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and the general public to articulate and put into operation plans and programs tailored to the needs of urban populations. The attempt by this Action Caucus to develop a model mission statement was consequently viewed by the participants as both urgent and appropriate.

Because of the complexity of the task, the caucus sponsors devised a procedure designed to insure careful preparation by the participants and fruitful interaction during the caucus sessions. The Action Caucus, itself, was the culmination of discussions between its sponsors, a survey of more than one hundred major colleges and universities as to their treatment of urban-related issues, and a paper prepared for another national meeting, "Communication Departments: Urbane or Urban?".[2]

The caucus consisted of four major phases leading to the sessions at the SCA meeting in December, 1972. In April, 1972, letters were sent to a number of persons who were actively involved in urban-located communication departments--mostly, but not entirely, speech-oriented departments--or persons who had indicated interest in the problems and potentialities of communicating in urban settings. Papers were solicited which considered the value of developing an urban mission statement as well as those more directly addressing the areas of research, teaching, and community service from the unique point of view of urban life. Three papers were selected to deal with each of these concerns: the development of mission, teaching, research, and service. They were chosen from more than thirty papers submitted.

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[2]MacDonald, D. "Communication Departments:Urbane or Urban?" Delivered at the May 1971 meeting of the International Communication Association, Atlanta, GA. Dr. MacDonald also conducted the survey referenced here.

These papers were reviewed, occasionally edited, then duplicated and mailed to individuals who had expressed particular interest in participating in such an action caucus, in response to the survey questionnaire or during subsequent correspondence and conversation.

Each of these persons was asked to respond in one or more of the following modes: 1) prepare a written statement of response to any or all of the papers, 2) prepare a written statement covering some area not addressed by any of the papers, or 3) participate in the caucus sessions.

Prior to the SCA meeting, three scholars agreed to act as observer-synthesizers, each chairing and reporting on the discussion in one of three content areas--research, teaching, and service. At the caucus sessions, participants selected themselves into these groups. Those whose papers had been accepted and distributed prior to the SCA convention served both as discussants and as resource persons.

Following these group meetings, which continued for about three hours, all participants assembled to hear reports and recommendations from each of the groups and to discuss and debate what they had heard. This general meeting continued for more than two hours. Finally, the observers met and discussed the content of the caucus, reflected upon the outcome of the discussions, and submitted summaries of recommendations growing from their groups' meetings. These are presented here as the raw material for a model mission statement for urban-located communication departments.

The caucus did not entirely achieve its purpose. But the recommendations presented here may be grist for succeeding efforts to define the priorities for urban-located communication departments.

Research Group

Professor Edward Bodaken, reporting on the discussions conducted among members of the group examining the problems and potentialities for communication research in urban settings, outlined the group's consensus as follows:

Basic Assumptions. The research group decided that research conducted by departments (speech communication or communication) located in urban settings should be predicated on the following basis:

1. Data, definitions, and empirical propositions generated by and/or derived from related disciplinarians (e.g., sociologists, political scientists, demographers, etc.) should be strongly considered in order to:
   a. provide additional theoretic rationale and heuristic components of research, and
   b. increase the probability of inter/multi/cross disciplinary research.
2. Researchers should conduct their investigations utilizing the perspective declared by the New Orleans Conference: "Research in speech communication focuses on the ways in which messages link participants during interactions. Emphasis is on the behavioral antecedents and consequences of messages and their variations as well as on the ways that messages interact with communication participants to produce behavior outcomes." (Conceptual Frontiers in Speech Communication, p. 33).
3. Functional utility should be the sine qua non of research endeavors in urban settings

Research Question. Moving from these fundamental assumptions, or research guidelines, the group members developed the following question which should serve as the primary issue of research in urban settings: Are there differences between communicative behaviors which are produced in urban and non-urban settings?

Research Issues/Crucial Variables. Implicit in the foregoing research question are several investigative demands and corollary issues that were generated. In a sense, these statements can be viewed as ways of approaching answers to the research question. The following seem to be among the most important aspects of the group's discussion:

1. The need exists for rigorously-collected and collated descriptive data regarding differences that exist between individuals in urban and non-urban settings. Such factors as uses of media, interpersonal networks and opinion leadership are notable examples of criterion measures.

2. Differences between quantitative and qualitative message characteristics obtaining among urban and non-urban populations should be examined and analyzed.

3. Research is needed which seeks to determine the form in which information is introduced and disseminated among individuals living in urban settings.

4. Differences in communicative behaviors as functions of social change should be studied both within and outside of urban environments.

5. Such psychological concepts as frustration need to be examined as they relate to probable or realistic occurrences of aggression. Presumably, the differences observed between urban and non-urban individuals would be investigated.

6. Further investigation is needed which seeks to specify differences in the language codes employed by various ethnic groups within urban environments.

7. In addition to an examination of communication as a facilitative behavior, there ought to be concentrated efforts attempting to determine the viability of communicative behavior as a blocking or retarding strategy.

8. Encouragement is to be given departments located in urban and non-urban settings to specify problems that are peculiar to their geographic or political areas. Indeed, such a specification may provide a department with a coherent and unifying framework for its research endeavors (Emphasis by the editors).

9. In addition to communication behaviors that are examined in interpersonal and mass media settings, investigators are encouraged to study intrapersonal communication phenomena. Such studies could tie directly to #7.

Community Service Group

Professor Murray H. Halfond, summarizing the deliberations of the group examining community service activities in urban-located departments of Communication, reported as follows:

There appeared to be consensus on the following:

A. Certain facts or observations:

1. Urban universities are promoting urban mission concepts for themselves built upon earlier service notions in academia.

2. In general, universities have not established adequate or discernible reward systems for the services faculty furnish in this area.

3. Universities and communities are not communicating about service in some of the following ways:

   a. Definitions of service as seen by universities and as seen by urban communities.

   b. Service applications--locations, types, costs, etc.

   c. Service duration--usually seen as long term in planning and execution by the academician, while frequently seen as short term in planning and action by the community.

4. Urban communication departments do not appear to have developed mission positions. The lack of such development may be because of some of the following reasons:

   a. Inadequate definition of service by the University.

   b. Inadequate system of rewards for individuals providing service.

   c. High priority for research and teaching by departments and universities.

5. Notwithstanding all of the above, individuals appear to be committed to the idea of service.

B. Recommendations:

1. On a long term basis, SCA should establish an ad hoc committee on service to:

   a. Tease out an operational definition of service.

   b. Develop and execute investigations into service areas and processes.

   c. Recommend to the profession-at-large guidelines for service.

2. On a short term basis, SCA should, via publications, promote greater interest in service by reporting on service programs and trends in universities, departments, etc. -- "clearinghouse concept."

3. On a short term basis, SCA should establish an annual award system for outstanding service within the discipline, based upon established guidelines. These awards should be given to individuals, departments and two-and-four year colleges.

4. On a long term basis, SCA should consider developing guidelines for departments which wish to include a service training component in their curricula.

Essentially, SCA should take a leadership role in examining services in general and in particular urban service components. Furthermore, SCA, through existing and new structures, should give increased recognition to service components of the discipline.

Teaching Group

Finally, Professor Michael Osborn, after observing the discussion of the caucus group concerned with unique approaches to teaching communicative skills in urban settings, submitted the following synthesis of those discussions:

Re-evaluation of the teaching mission of speech and communication departments in the urban setting must confront at the outset

some rather large questions of definition and purpose. In our study group with the Action Caucus on the Urban Mission we encountered vastly different interpretations of the term "urban." One researcher took a concentrated population of at least 500,000 persons as the reference point for the determination of an urban setting. Another contributor insisted that American society can now be considered as a generic urban setting. The implications of such divergence are enormous. Clearly, the first approach anticipates the development of a specialized style of teaching, as well as research and instruction, for a discrete number of colleges and universities. The second approach points towards a possible total redrafting of the purpose and programs of speech and communication departments across the country and wherever located.

While such divergence in theoretical approach does exist, it must be admitted that the definition implicit in our deliberations tended to emphasize the first approach. Thus we spoke more of specialized programs of instruction and teacher training for departments located in areas characterized by relative population density. While we shall not explore them here, other problems of definition surround such terms as "teaching," what it is and ought to be, and what objectives it should pursue, as well as the rationale which supports (or ought to support) academic units which have been designated as departments of speech, communication, speech-communication, etc.

Our discipline as traditionally conceived has always had a dual character: rhetoric is on the one hand an art of intellectual inquiry and on the other a practical skill. But both points of view converge and agree on the instrumental character of rhetoric: it exists to facilitate the transfer of information, values, and prescriptions among humans. In this sense our study is originally and essentially an applied discipline which establishes its identity as it deals with pragmatic concerns.

When conditions exist which constrict the networks of communication, which increase the numbers of persons trying to gain access to these constricted networks, which choke the networks with an overload of messages, which depersonalize and dehumanize both initiators and recipients of messages, then the challenge to those who would manage networks of communication or create more adequate networks becomes immediate and compelling. These are the conditions and this is the challenge to which the urban department of communication arts must respond, if it is to retain its identity as a teacher of an applied, pragmatic, and instrumental art.

In this response, we suggest that the urban department consider reorienting its programs and courses in light of three major objectives:

1. One-to-one interaction. The pressures of population density operate away from individuals meeting and relating in ways which confirm and enrich their mutual individualities. A liberal and humane education in the humanities must be reconceived not simply as the development of the individual, but as the protection

of individualism in a societal context which may become less and less supportive of individualistic values.

2. Social action planning and implementation. As urban departments identify specific problems which, taken together, create the conditions of communication crisis, such departments may react not merely by providing coping, compensatory, and protective behaviors through one-to-one interaction programs. An additional and justifiable reaction is to assist communities and groups in direct, head-on campaigns to correct such problems. In such campaigns town-and-gown distinctions become archaic and students learn through direct participation. Caution must be exercised, however, so that university personnel will not be regarded as exploitative dabblers in real community problems. Indigenous community leadership must be accentuated, not supplanted, by such activism. Ill-conceived though well-intentioned programs of social activism run the danger of becoming part of the problem, even, indeed, of augmenting the problem (Emphasis supplied by the editors).

3. Conflict management. As people find themselves blocked from access to communication networks, or bombarded with increasingly frenetic concentrations of messages which strain through such networks, frustration and conflict are inevitable human reactions and are even becoming accepted as a natural part of the urban scene. Traditional rhetoric has never had to address such personal and group problems of "audience." We would suggest that urban departments consider a new question for teaching and research: how can we manage conflict so that it becomes productive in outcome,

rather than non-productive or destructive? "I win, you lose" strategies of communication behavior must be transcended and counteracted by the urban department in its teaching mission.

No doubt, an entirely novel arsenal of techniques must be devised to pursue these major teaching objectives, but we would suggest especially that the efficacy of simulation games and role playing, as well as the objectifying values of traditional debate exercises, be explored.

Finally, we would urge a reconsideration of the problem of training teachers who will teach multi-group classes in urban settings. Teachers must be prepared to encounter different coding and communication systems among such groups. The teacher must respect these differences, and at the same time must possess some minimum proficiency within the various codes. The teacher must recognize that different coding systems may well imply different world views. If the teacher <u>cannot</u> provide communicative access across these codes, misunderstanding and frustration will characterize his or her classes. If the teacher <u>is</u> able to communicate across these codes, and to help different groups gain communication access to each other, then his or her classes should be enriched by the diversity of perspectives latent among the groups.

As we set forth this ideal for teacher training, we are cognizant that some variations in coding systems may have been established to block communication in order to protect groups from exploitative interactions. We feel, however, that this original motivation for code variation is not an impossible nor impassable barrier to overcome.

Summary

Three major conclusions seem warranted from our experiences with this Action Caucus, including the letters, conversations, reports, and recommendations which followed it. First, there is an evident interest among communication scholars to tailoring research, teaching, and community service activities to meet the exigencies of urban living. Without question, there is expertise available to pursue new and potentially fruitful approaches to these traditional academic activities. Second, the Action Caucus on a Model Mission Statement for Urban-Located Departments of Communication is only a first, small step toward re-shaping the priorities and pursuits of urban-located departments. Third, the model of the Caucus itself may illustrate how convention programs of the future may be conducted.

If continued, the work begun by the Caucus promises to define new and involving directions for research, teaching, and community service activities in urban-located communication departments, including the elimination of artificial interdepartmental barriers.